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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of school consolidation in Randolph County, West Virginia, which includes some of the most rural, mountainous land in the state. West Virginians have built schools, reorganized schools, and made numerous changes to structures over the last 250 years. Some changes had community support; others encountered stormy opposition. In 1990, rural residents of the county had a rare success in resisting the most recent wave of state-driven consolidation, and one surviving school--Pickens School--is the smallest K-12 school in the state. This thesis reviews past research and relates it to consolidation issues in Randolph County: what drives consolidation, whether it is in the best interest of students, alternatives to consolidation, and whether the idea of economies of scale should be the main factor affecting educational decisions. Following a history of public schools in West Virginia, background is presented on Randolph County schools and on the 1990 consolidation fight. Issues included the local school board's efforts to gain state funding for a new high school by closing its smallest schools, school board claims that consolidation would improve educational quality, and the dangerous and lengthy bus rides that students would have after consolidation. The final chapter presents implications for other rural areas and alternatives to consolidation. (Contains 51 references.) (SV)

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The Consolidation of Public Schools In Randolph County, West Virginia: A Case Study.

A Thesis presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Salem International University

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By

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Abstract

Consolidation of public schools has had a major effect on education in the United States. School districts have been torn apart as public education systems try to cope with shrinking student populations and a waning tax base.

Randolph County, West Virginia has been no stranger to school consolidation. A battle over the closing of Pickens and Valley Head Schools from 1989 to 1991 left many wounds which still in 2001 have not healed. Pickens K-12 is a unique school given its small size of less than 60 students and its sheer isolation. Citizens of the Pickens area have a deep sense of pride for their community and school.

Randolph County Schools failed to include the public in their decisions to consolidate their district schools. Research has shown that community involvement is a major factor in successful school mergers. Citizens wish to retain control over the education of area children. School ownership has been a 'given' from the inception of schools in the forts of the western Virginia frontier.

Great improvements in educational performance have not been realized through closing small schools for economy sake. One of the main points included in the brief written by the West Virginia State Board of Education when refusing to allow the closing of Pickens School, cited a reduction in the quality of education.

One major argument for closing small schools is cost saving. Often, these costs are offset to some extent by the increase in the transportation budget.

Consolidation of public schools is not a dead issue and will continue to be explored by school districts. As budgets tighten, school districts will find a need in the future to work with citizens and neighboring districts in an effort to find creative methods of curriculum delivery.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

The face of education has changed significantly in West Virginia since the first schools opened during the early 16th century. From the inception of the Virginia Colony in 1624 until the present, the state has faced the challenge of educating youths and adults. Schools were important in colonial times, but working and carving out a living on the soil often superseded the need to focus heavily on education. West Virginians have built schools, reorganized schools and made numerous changes to structures over the last two hundred and fifty years. Some changes were met with open arms and strong backs, while others encountered stormy opposition. Some recommended changes succeeded against community opposition while others were defeated. This study will focus on the changing housing patterns of primary and secondary schools, and on their evolution throughout West Virginia's history.

Ultimately, the focus of this paper was on one rural Appalachian county, and the struggles resulting from the consolidation that have occurred there. The schools of rural Randolph County in the West Virginia highlands began as one-room schools in the state of Virginia. Insofar as the direction taken by local schools is ultimately determined by the character of an area and its people, as well as the influence of governmental policies and mandates, the county of Randolph ranks as one of interest, and it was examined for a number of reasons. It has some of the most rural, mountainous land in West Virginia, yet the county seat of

Elkins, a large and somewhat affluent hub, has been no stranger to school consolidation conflicts. The most recent consolidation in 1991 resulted in a great battle over the naming of the new consolidated high school. The county's rural citizens were also successful in defeating a move by the school district to consolidate two of its outlying public schools in 1990. One of the schools that remained open, Pickens School, holds the distinction of being the smallest K-12 school in the state of West Virginia.

Because this issue has been of continuing interest to many people, many facets of school consolidation were examined in this work. School reorganizations will continue to be debated and attempted as long as school children are brought together for education. Furthermore the ramifications and public feelings that such consolidation efforts produce will also continue to affect communities. Education does not stagnate but rather grows and changes along with society. Through an examination of this history, one can become empowered to better chart the future course public schools will undertake.

Research Questions

Consolidation of small rural schools has raised some valid questions. What has driven the consolidation movement? Has consolidation been in the best interest of the student? Has consolidation achieved its goals and reached an end-point? Do alternatives to consolidation exist? The idea of economy of scale is a business approach that has been applied to education. It is true that the business of educating youth should be concerned with the 'bottom line', but should society allow cost efficiency to be one of the main factors driving education programs?

Limitations of the Study

The main focus of this study was a review of past research. No surveys were undertaken that would have involved members of Randolph County, West Virginia Schools or Randolph County, West Virginia's citizens.

Importance of the Study

Consolidation of public schools is a major concern in West Virginia as well as the entire United States.

CHAPTER TWO

The History of Schools in West Virginia

In order to examine the changes that have occurred from the beginning in educating students in the Appalachian Region of West Virginia, it was necessary to start with the state of Virginia. Randolph County was a county at the time that the West Virginia region was still a part of Virginia.

It is certain that structured education on some level was occurring in the Virginia Colony from its settlement in 1624. The creation of Henrico University in 1619 was the spark that initiated Governor Sir Francis Wyatt in 1621 to decree that all towns in Virginia educate their youth in preparation for Henrico University (Miller, 1907). At such an early time, the area that would become West Virginia was still a wilderness with no permanent settlements yet established and very little population of white settlers. Concurrent with the inception of Henrico University, Rev. Patrick Copeland established the East India School at Charles City, Virginia (Miller, 1907). From this time until the Revolutionary War ended in 1781, students were being educated in parish schools by the churches. There was no school law and no attendance policy in Virginia at that time. The research does not indicate the mix of classes in these parish schools, but the general practice to extend education to the wealthy and not the poor would most likely have occurred. These schools would certainly have been all white, as these were times of slavery in the Virginia Colony and blacks were denied access to education.

After the Revolutionary War, the parish schools dissolved and charity schools were organized for the poor whites with private schools for the wealthy. Most charity schools tend to provide enough education for reading the Bible with an emphasis toward learning a trade. The private or select schools were preparing the wealthy children for the universities (Miller, 1907).

The first mention of a school in the area that would ultimately become West Virginia is found in the surveying journal of George Washington. Surveying for Lord Fairfax on the Upper Potomac and the South Branch on August 18, 1747, Washington surveyed a tract beginning at a station in "the school house old field." No mention was made of a stream or rock that might identify the exact location, but it is believed to be in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia (Miller, 1907). The first definite mention of a school in West Virginia refers to a cabin located in the South Branch Valley at Romney in 1753. As the West Virginia region was settled, the settlers erected a large central dwelling that every family lived in as they built individual family cabins. When all had moved from the settlement center, it served as the school, church, and community center (Miller, 1907).

As the frontier was pushed westward the settlers no longer needed to live in settlements. Consequently pioneers built homes throughout the mountains and built a cabin for the school in a convenient location. Such locations were usually on the edge of a field near a spring and were subsequently called 'old field schools'. The pioneers built these schools, hired teachers and opened the doors to anyone who could pay the tuition. The purpose of these schools was not to educate children for the university, but to enable the child to read the Scriptures.

The frontiersmen were proud people and did not wish for themselves or their children to be ignorant (Miller, 1907).

On December 22, 1796 the first Virginia school law was enacted called the "Alderman School Law."

> In the act, each county should annually elect three of their most honest and able men to serve as aldermen of the county. On the second Monday in May they were to meet and divide the county by population into sections. On the first Monday in September the householders and aldermen were to meet and decide on a school house site. This done and the building erected and maintained, the aldermen would select a teacher. All children were to be taught reading, writing and arithmetic for three years gratis. Taxes were to be collected to pay for all expenses (Miller, 1907).

In 1809 "The Literary Fund" was established to procure money for the encouragement of learning. By 1814 it was established that all lands forfeited for unpaid taxes would go to the Literary Fund, thus causing the fund to amass a large surplus fund of over a million dollars (Miller, 1907).

In 1817 the Commonwealth set aside $45,000 a year to educate the white youth. Each county court was to appoint several school commissioners to oversee the distribution of funds (Miller, 1907). The District Free School Act of 1847 established that counties with two-thirds majority vote, would educate all youth from age 5 to 21 for free, but by 1860 only three counties west of the Blue Ridge Mountains had passed free education (Miller, 1907). Concurrently passed in the 1847 general assembly session, was a law that no books used in school instruction should favor any religious tenet (Ambler, 1951). Consequently this separated the free public schools from those operated by the church.

The following account by John Strange Hall, Superintendent of Lewis County, West Virginia, is a description of Skin Creek Schoolhouse.

> The house was 16x18 feet; built of round logs, slightly scrunched down on the inside of the door, loft and roof were made of boards-the latter weighted down with poles. The cracks were chinked and daubed except one at the end and one at the side next, to the door, which was near the corner. There was also a small window on the opposite side near the fire. Instead of glass for filling the windows, one of the patrons furnished a few copies of the Pittsburg "Christian Advocate" for the purpose. These were cut into strips of suitable width and supported by upright slats, were pasted in the windows and greased to let in the light. My teacher told me it was to let the dark out. Broad poplar slabs were leveled with a broad ax and closely jointed for a floor, and others dressed more carefully were put up in front of the windows for writing desks. Chestnut saplings split, leveled and shaved and supported by legs of suitable length, served for seats. Every pupil carried his own back, for the benches had none. Blackboards did not adorn the schoolhouse of that age. The chief glory of the edifice was the chimney. It was no half-wooden concern liable to take fire whenever an arm full of dry wood was thrown on. One-half the north end was cut out, and a rough, though substantial, stove chimney with a capacity to absorb a respectable log heap and roast an ox on the hearth completed the schoolhouse (Ambler, 1951).

The rolling lands of the eastern panhandle were the first regions of western Virginia to be settled to any extent. On August 7, 1847 school commissioners were elected for each of the twenty-two districts in Jefferson County and an additional 23 schools were established (Ambler, 1951). Boat and rail transportation improvements in the northern and eastern portions of western Virginia allowed for population increases, thus causing a need for more schools.

In 1848 Mr. James E. Wharton of Wheeling, the chief town in Western Virginia, went to Richmond to procure legislation to begin their first school (Whitehill, 1902). Even with the increased number of schools, fewer than fifty percent of children eligible attended school, and attendance was poor among the

children enrolled. Sparseness of population was still a large hurdle to establishing district-free schools. By 1860 there were a large number of schools located throughout western Virginia, but no teacher training schools had been established (Ambler, 1951).

The years from 1860-1863 would see a lot of skirmishes connected with the Civil War and thus the focus on education would take a back seat to the war. During the same period there were many influential people working on the passage of a bill to establish West Virginia statehood. Both the signing of the initiative by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 making the area of Virginia west of the Allegheny Mountains into a state, and the end to the Civil War in 1865 renewed the focus on establishing schools in West Virginia (Ambler, 1951).

The first Congress of West Virginia would see the passage of an education bill calling for a thorough and efficient system of free school for the youth of the new state. The bill called for taxation and forfeiture funds to be allocated to provide for education in West Virginia. Methodist ministers were instrumental in the push for the establishment of quality schools in West Virginia (Ambler, 1951). Reverend W.B. White was employed as the first Superintendent of Schools in West Virginia as the growing state began its journey for educational excellence. In an effort to train teachers for the growing number of schools in West Virginia, the first normal school was established at Marshall College in Cabell County on February 27th in 1867 (Whitehill, 1902).

In 1870, enrollment increased by forty percent over the previous year. Of the schools built in 1870, 260 of the 465 buildings were of log construction. The total

number of West Virginia schools was 2,093 structures-1,104 frame, 17 stone, 68 brick, 904 log (Ambler, 1951).

By 1873, high schools had been established in West Virginia at Fairmont, Parkersburg and Charleston (Ambler, 1951). Fewer log structures were being constructed, indicating a possible saturation in the backcountry or the establishment of frame structures in the small communities. The days of the old field log structure were quickly declining.

In 1877 a "compulsory attendance law" was passed termed the Thirty-five Percent Bill. If attendance fell below thirty-five percent in any month the school was to be closed and the teacher dismissed. The teacher was responsible for enforcement of the law. In 1897 the act was amended to require children ages eight to fourteen within two miles of a school to attend classes. By 1905, there were 4,819 schoolhouses. The number of log buildings declined from 1,316 to 152 (Ambler, 1951).

The graded high school began its climb in popularity during the years surrounding 1900. In 1897, the number of high schools grew to 25 and this number would double by 1906. It was during this year that the first county high school was established in Tyler County, West Virginia. Over the next year the number of high schools grew to 72 with an emphasis on state standards for graded high schools (Ambler, 1951).

The new school code was passed in 1908 that allowed for school consolidation and the transportation of pupils (Ambler, 1951). By 1909, the state superintendent of schools created a division of high schools to push for standards

that would allow acceptance by West Virginia University (WVU), as only sixteen high schools were recognized at this time (Ambler, 1951).

In 1910 the state authorized the first consolidation plan at Sherrard, Union District in Marshall County, when six schools were closed and a three-room school was opened to replace them. The years between 1910 and 1928 would produce high schools classed as first, second, and third according to the years of instruction; the number of high schools accredited by WVU would reach 74, surpassed only by Texas and Georgia; junior high schools would become popular, and 88 such schools would open in West Virginia; six county high schools would be created in the state, with district free schools still being the most popular option for counties (Ambler, 1951).

By 1916, after eight years of authorization, 300 rural one-room schools were closed, and by 1928, 103 first class, 24 second class, and 14 third class high schools were consolidated (Ambler, 1951). Cost savings from teacher salaries was the main reason cited for consolidation, but expense was also cited as a reason not to consolidate due to high transportation cost on poor quality mountain roads. The initial purchase of school buses available at this time would contribute greatly to high transportation cost, even though school law did not require anyone over two miles from a school to attend. In order to justify consolidation, it would be necessary to transport pupils over increasingly larger distances to the new schools. Consequently, cost savings from fewer teachers would often not offset increasing transportation costs, and a separate Department of Transportation

would be needed to oversee the huge expenditures necessary to implement mass transportation of students (Whitehill, 1902).

In 1930 a Department of Consolidation was formed to explore large scale restructuring of schools. The findings from an in-depth study conducted by the Department of Consolidation would guide the State Department of Education in closing many schools and building larger consolidated schools. One trend that had developed was to merge many one-room schools into two-room schools. The recommendation of the report from the Consolidation Department was to create schools that were larger since the two-room schools had the same limitations as the one-room schools. The recommendations were explicit that there would be great benefits from teachers instructing only one grade level, a situation only possible in large schools. Thus began the trend of building schools that contained first through twelfth grade classes. The Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Schools for 1930 stated the main reason for people to be against consolidation was the nostalgia of the little red school, obviously not a valid argument for the people. Reasons for consolidation were efficiency, better school conditions, more equipment, better teachers, more liberal curriculum, better attendance and a greater number of students going on to high school (Cook, 1930).

The fundamental issues for the success of consolidation were: conditions conducive for transportation beyond walking distance; communities' ability to fund new schools; the topography right for consolidation; and time 'ripe' for consolidation (Cook, 1930). These fundamental ideas guided the State

Department of Education in creating the Department of Consolidation and initiating an extensive study of consolidation in West Virginia and the nation. The findings and recommendations of that study would be instrumental in the closing of thousands of small schools throughout West Virginia. Tantamount to their argument for consolidation, was the finding that no teacher, no matter how competent, could effectively teach multiple grades according to current curriculum standards in a one-teacher and two-teacher type school. Consolidation would therefore greatly improve the education of the rural child, thereby providing the same quality education that the urban child received. During the Great Depression in the 1930's, West Virginia consolidated school districts into county systems, a feat many states are still trying to accomplish (Ambler, 1951).

Prior to consolidation, Cook's 1930 studies cited that West Virginia schools were not efficient, as evidenced by the high per capita cost of educating youth. This study conclusively proved that West Virginia could transport students below the average cost of most other states. Additional findings from the Consolidation Department study indicated a great need for playground and athletic field space at schools, and additionally a need to provide for healthier environments (Cook, 1930).

The recommendations of the Consolidation Department were for each county in West Virginia to conduct a complete study of all buildings used to house pupils and ascertain their suitability to fit into that county's future plans. Given this mandate, which applied pressure for efficiency and consolidation, a county school system would be able to make long-range plans for its facilities.

The major recommendation that would have the greatest impact on school systems was for the state legislature to create a School Consolidation Fund to make loans to county schools for improvements. The legislature was urged to tax coal, oil, gas, timber and gravel to procure funds for "building sites and building materials; installation of modern heating, lighting, bathrooms and laboratories; seats, lockers and necessary permanent investments; and for moneys only to be allocated for structures of 150 or more pupils made of stone, brick veneer or like materials" (Cook, 1932). It is of great significance that the money was tied to larger schools built of enduring materials. It is of no small consequence that this recommendation resembles the modern West Virginia School Building Authority's approach to economy of scale. Economy of scale is a business approach to reduction in cost per unit resulting from increased production, realized through operational efficiencies (askjeves.com, 2001). This would be a carrot dangled before school boards to induce consolidation. The study by the Consolidation Department identified three steps essential for the construction of a consolidation plan: a thorough assessment of the county including every facet of all communities; selection of the centers of consolidation; tax base, population, roads; and ability to organize the center of consolidation to have schools that meet local need (Cook, 1932).

There were peak times for the closing of one-room schools, but the coming of the Great American Depression would severely limit West Virginia's ability to build large consolidated schools. Additionally a movement of people from the rural farms of West Virginia to industrial centers outside of the state would reduce

the number of students available for consolidated schools. This would have the effect of increasing the need to close rural schools and consolidate facilities. After the Depression, an awareness of the need for a good education focused attention on the consolidated high school and served to fuel the consolidation trend. This same focus on improvements in education would resurface with the space race following the launch of Sputnik I by the United Socialist Soviet Republic on October 14, 1957. Still the exodus of people from rural West Virginia to the cities would continue, hence forcing more consolidation. During the 1960's and 1970's, increased mechanization in the coal fields as well as coal seams being mined-out along with dwindling oil and gas reserves, would continue the decline of jobs in rural West Virginia, thus sending more families across state lines in search of work. An emerging trend from the 1950's-1990's of having smaller families would continue the need to consolidate and transport students (Seal, 1990).

CHAPTER THREE

Randolph County, West Virginia Schools

Background

Randolph County was formed from Harrison County in 1787. Named for Virginia statesman and soldier Edmund Jennings Randolph, it ranks as the largest county in the state of West Virginia. Randolph County typifies many West Virginia counties, with a large rural population and one small urban center serving as the county seat. A trip by car between the far ends of this mountainous county spans a time of two hours.

Elkins, with a population of approximately 9000, became the county seat after a referendum wrestled the courthouse from Beverly in 1898. It is named for statesman Stephen B. Elkins and became incorporated in 1889. Elkins serves as the hub for the county's educational system with the Randolph County Board of Education (RCBOE) offices, and the bulk of the county schools located in the town. Elkins currently has one consolidated high school, one consolidated middle school and four consolidated elementary schools. The remainder of the county has two K-12 schools, five elementary schools and one 7-12 school. Elkins is also home to Davis and Elkins College, a private institution of higher education, which opened its doors in 1904 (Rice, 1987).

Education in this eastern highland county of West Virginia began the same as in the other school systems, in one-room schools. In 1856, Randolph County had 15 school districts but only two schools. The next ten years would see the number

of schools increase to 12. By 1919, there were 205 schools, with an enrollment of 7143 white and 128 black pupils (Rice, 1987).

The first school for black students in Randolph County was Riverside, created in 1911. Portia McDonald was the first black woman to be principal at Riverside and later after its closure in 1954, became the first black teacher employed to teach at Elkins High School. She was employed to teach English, French, drama and speech (Rice, 1987). In the mid-1930's, Beverly Colored School was consolidated with Riverside School as a cost-saving measure. A new Riverside school was built in 1953, but was consequently closed in 1954 after the historic Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka ruling on segregation. This consolidation, along with the rest of the nation's black school consolidations, faced challenges.

One and two-room schoolhouses were consolidated as the nation's agricultural society changed into an industrialized urban-centered society. Family farms, spread across the mountains, were abandoned as roads improved and urban centers outside West Virginia's borders attracted workers. This trend to find employment outside of West Virginia, coupled with smaller family size, increased the need to consolidate schools. While few of the old one-room schools still stand on the hills of Randolph County, some have been converted to hay storage while others serve as living quarters. They stand as a reminder of a time when a rising new state worked hard to educate all classes of its children (Rice, 1987).

The town of Pickens in southern Randolph County had its beginnings when James Pickens began farming the region. It grew to be a thriving lumber and

coal-loading town connected to the outside world by the Western Maryland Railroad. Originally children of this area attended the Turkey Bone School on the ridge behind James Pickens' farm. The Turkey Bone and Hastlebacher Schools of Helvetia were merged with Pickens School in 1959 (Nelson, 1951).

Helvetia is a small town to the North of Pickens, which was settled by Swiss immigrants. This small town was bound to Pickens by this 1959 consolidation, and later by the fight to stop the proposed consolidation that occurred in 1989.

Pickens is situated in southwestern Randolph County two miles from the Webster County border. It became a town in 1890, the same year its first school was erected (Nelson, 1971). Its rich timbering history is well documented in the book Haven in the Hardwoods by Arnold E. Nelson. The book chronicles the town very effectively, but gives few details about the schools that were erected there.

The first school built was not a high school, but served students through the 8th grade. The nearest high school at that time was at Buckhannon in Upshur County. Pickens is located geographically between the current high schools of Webster County High, Buckhannon-Upshur High, and Tygarts Valley Junior/Senior High. Tygarts Valley Jr/Sr High, located in Mill Creek, is the closest high school to Pickens School. The drive between the two schools spans 25 miles crossing four treacherous mountains. Pickens is at the end of Randolph County feeder road 47. A trip to Webster Springs is over unimproved gravel roads. The trip to Buckhannon is by far the easier trip having only two mountains with gentle grades to traverse.

In 1927 Pickens opened its first 3-year high school headed by John Caplinger. This became a full 12-year school in 1936, the year the school burned (Nelson, 1971). Consequently at a meeting on February 6 in 1936, the RCBOE proposed that the Works Progress Administration build a replacement eight-room school for $29,000 with $6000 to be supplied by the Board (RCBOE Minutes, 1936). The school changed very little until April 23, 1952, when the Board voted to spend $55,978 to add a gymnasium, home economics room and vocational agriculture shop (RCBOE Minutes, 1936). In 1987 the Board spent $36,000 to replace the coal furnace at Pickens School, which was more than the original 8-room structure had cost in 1936.

The Consolidation Issue

Student enrollment around 1950 averaged 150 students in Pickens School for grades K-12. The student population declined to approximately 50 by 1990 for grades K-12.

In remarks to the Board early in 1989, Randolph County School Superintendent Dr. Billy Ray Dunn stated that upon facing the loss of 35 staff members, a decision needed to be made whether to let programs suffer or close schools (RCBOE Minutes, 1989). The county was losing population and the tax base was declining. Prior to this, a tax study group, organized by Mike Ross of Coalton in Randolph County, was fighting excess levies and property reevaluation statewide. This was a very popular movement in a state with an aging population.

At the second meeting in March 1989, several people from Pickens and Valley Head spoke in favor of keeping local schools open. At this same meeting,

Director of Student Services Roger Brady informed the board that they would need to schedule public hearings if they were going to close the two schools before the upcoming year. He went on to state these reasons for considering the closing of Pickens and Valley Head Schools: the continuing decrease in enrollment; the under utilization of facilities; the improvement of curriculum for students; and the future cost of maintenance of these facilities (RCBOE Minutes, 1989). The communities of Pickens and Valley Head quickly organized a resistance to the closure, prompting the RCBOE to take no action during 1989.

Even though the population decreased in the outlying areas of the county, growth was still experienced in the city of Elkins. Four new elementary schools were built between 1974 and 1976 to replace Third Ward, First Ward and Central Schools. In the mid-1980's, an addition was made to Elkins Junior High School and the 9th grade was moved there to accommodate overcrowding at Elkins High School. All of these facilities, with the exception of North School, operated at near capacity levels. With anticipated growth in the Elkins area, it was imperative that solutions to the overcrowding in the city schools and the deterioration of Elkins High be found (Stutler, March 1990).

Elkins High School was a highly outdated facility, having been opened in 1926. It had settled a number of feet due to being built on soft flood plain and fill material. The population of Elkins agreed on the need to replace the facility, but the political climate was not right for passing an excess levy to raise funds for construction of a new high school (Seal, 1990).

In a report to the county board at their January 15, 1990 meeting, Superintendent Dunn stated that the "School Building Authority (SBA) informed him that for more favorable consideration of funds to build a new high school, they might need to consider operating fewer schools" (RCBOE Minutes, 1990). At this meeting the Board voted to accept the Comprehensive Education Facilities Plan for Randolph County Schools (CEFP), which outlined closing Pickens and Valley Head Schools for the 1990-91 school year. Reasons given for the closures were staffing problems and budget concerns. Also in the CEFP, Coalton would be consolidated with Elkins along with the 9th grade from Elkins Junior High to make a new Randolph County High School. The 6th graders from all Elkins area schools and Beverly School would be moved to Elkins Junior High to create a middle school (RCBOE Minutes, 1990).

At the conclusion of this meeting, Mrs. Daetwyler-Spencer, from the Pickens area, resigned her position on the Randolph County Board of Education (Kleist, 1990). Distraught citizens from the areas affected by the proposed consolidations arranged meetings to combat the closures. Out of these meetings the Randolph County Rural Board of Education was founded, hereafter called the Rural Board. Hugh Rogers of Kerens in Randolph County was retained as legal council for the group, and citizens were mobilized to begin the task of defeating the consolidation. As a result of the Rural Board's actions, two Randolph County Board of Education members from the outlying areas of Mill Creek and Harman were elected in May (Stutler, 1990).

Prior to this occurrence, the Board voted in March 1990 to hold public hearings for unveiling their "Proposals to Close Pickens and Valley Head Schools." They cited the Recht Decision of 1982 for a "thorough and efficient" education as a driving force for counties to make school closures. The following reasons for proceeding with the school closings were stated in the Proposal:

1. Changes in the state aid formula were forcing staff reductions.
2. Declining school enrollment had created disproportionate utilization of facilities and staff.
3. Closing the schools would improve educational programs (RCBOE Minutes, 1990).

Their figures showed that substantial monetary savings would be realized by the reduction of the number of schools in the county. The Board stated that the three receiving schools would need no major revisions to accommodate students from Pickens and Valley Head Schools, but major renovations would be necessary to continue using the Pickens facility. The document further stated that even though Tygarts Valley Jr/Sr High School had one section built in the early 1920's that was not barrier free, the structure would be replaced when funds became available. It would not be until 1999 that the SBA would appropriate funding for this project. Perhaps the biggest blow to the residents of the two communities was the Proposal's statement that a high quality, equitable education was not being provided under presently mandated policies and standards (RCBOE Proposal to Close Pickens School, 1989). In response to the Proposal, the citizens group alleged that the main impetus for the consolidation was to secure funding for the building of a consolidated high school in Elkins (Dunn, 1990).

The Rural Board began its fight by contacting the University Council for Educational Administrations Center for Education Finance to request an in-depth study of the consolidation plan. This group, based at Kansas State University, produced an extensive document arguing against the closure of Pickens School. The document cited many sources, which concluded that school size has a minimal effect on student performance. The University Council mentioned a report produced a few years earlier by the professional staff at Pickens School that detailed many examples of academic achievement by their alumni. A well-rounded curriculum was identified at the school with ample opportunity for one-on-one attention. They aptly point out that the data produced by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills is unfairly skewed, given the low number of students from Pickens School who took the test. Many other indicators pointed to high academic achievement. The authors felt that the bus ride to Mill Creek, beginning at 6:30 a.m. daily for some students, would be too high a risk for the benefits derived. Most aptly stated in their conclusion:

> The state of West Virginia is to be commended for its efforts to improve education across its vastly diverse population and geography. At the same time, however, it must be cognizant that the constitutional mandate as interpreted in the Recht decision demands the most appropriate educational program for each individual child. An appropriate educational program cannot be inordinately driven by the revenue dimension—a condition which most assuredly has a profound influence in the Randolph County Schools (Thompson, et al., 1989).

Danial Lehmann of Helvitia did an extensive study of the roads between Pickens and Mill Creek and produced a document entitled The Transportation Issue for the West Virginia Board of Education. His analysis of the road conditions as well as the weather conditions portrayed a bus ride that was not

worth the inherent risks. The three county roads that make up the route experience elevation changes of 1500 feet through an area that receives an average annual snow fall of 168 inches. Placing school buses on narrow winding mountains with no guard-rails coupled with coal and log truck traffic would certainly endanger the lives of the Pickens children. Letters from engineers and safety and health officials substantiated the high risk involved in bus travel on the narrow roads from Pickens to Mill Creek. Parents of the Pickens School children remarked to the local school board that they would send their child to Upshur County Schools rather than have them risk the daily bus ride to Mill Creek.

On March 9, 1990, the West Virginia State Board of Education adopted a Resolution on School Consolidation and Student Transportation. The Board announced that decisions on such proposals would be based on three priorities:

1. Improving educational programs for students.
2. Avoiding inappropriate increases in travel time.
3. Achieving efficient utilization of personnel.

(West Virginia State Board of Education Minutes, 1990)

The Randolph County Board of Education voted in early March 1990 to close Pickens and Valley Head Schools. The Board chose not to meet with the Rural Board or consider any of the alternatives citizens of the affected areas had suggested. A letter from Randolph County School Superintendent Dunn indicated that the Board was under the impression that closing schools was a necessary step toward procuring funds from the SBA to build the much needed Elkins High School (Dunn, 1990).

Members of the Rural Board began contacting public officials from Governor Gaston Caperton to the superintendents of surrounding counties in search of

relief. They received a commitment from the Pocahontas County School System to cooperate with residents at Snowshoe Resort in transferring their children to Valley Head School to reduce the length of their bus ride. Consequently, these additional students would increase the efficiency of the Valley Head School. Discussions were held with Tucker County Schools to consider a regional center for the students from Cannan Valley and Harman areas. The possibility of high school students from Hackers Valley in Webster County coming to Pickens was discussed with the Webster County School System in order to reduce the Webster students' bus ride and make Pickens a more efficient setting (See map, Appendix A). Dialogues aimed at regional schools that could reduce lengthy bus rides (the consequence of prior consolidations) were pursued. The Rural Board left few stones unturned in their search for alternatives to the CEFP proposal to close their rural schools (Rogers, 1990).

In late March of 1990, an announcement by the SBA left Randolph County out of contention for the money to build a 13.7 million-dollar high school in Elkins. SBA officials did not discount the possibility that Randolph County could receive money in the second round later that year, but felt that the consolidation issue needed to be addressed in such a way to better serve the elementary students of Pickens. Additionally, the SBA felt that the cost of the Elkins High project was too high and thus needed to be reduced (Stutler, 1990).

The Rural Board, driven by what appeared to be a victory, quickly produced an "Alternative Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan." Their Plan called for a reduction of administrative staff and the use of creative staffing as an alternative

to consolidation for monetary savings. The Rural Board felt that pursuing regional schools with neighboring counties would provide the most efficient education for the students involved. Increasing the bus ride for Pickens elementary age children by one hour on dangerous mountain roads became the crack in the RCBOE armor that the rural citizens needed. They began to focus their fight solely on the closing of Pickens School in an effort to defeat the consolidation (Rogers, H., Telephone interview, September 2000).

Closing Valley Head alone would not have greatly increased bus rides. Additionally, U. S. Route 219 from Valley Head to Homestead School, the proposed receiving school, was a good quality road. High school buses were already making this trip along the Tygarts Valley River. It was the portion of the trip from Pickens to Mill Creek between the mountaintop at Sugar Grove down to Star Bridge and back up the mountain to Blue Rock that was without a doubt a very dangerous stretch of highway. Deep mines in this drainage area were sending truck-loads of unprocessed coal to the Carter-ROAG processing plant at Star Bridge while trucks bearing the waste slag were climbing up Blue Rock to the reclamation site. In addition to this high volume of truck traffic, trucks were transporting the processed coal out through Mill Creek for industrial use. Further heavy truck traffic was added with the logs being hauled to the sawmills located throughout the Tygarts Valley. All of this heavy traffic, coupled with a 1000 foot change in elevation on curvy mountain roads in an area of unusually high snowfall, painted a picture of unnecessary danger for a school bus (Lehmann, 1990).

During the first West Virginia Board of Education meeting in May 1990, the Randolph County Board of Education and the Rural Board presented their remarks concerning the consolidation of Valley Head and Pickens Schools. Mr. Rogers, attorney for RCRBOE effectively refuted all points of the Randolph County consolidation. The most powerful punch was delivered in his closing paragraph:

> This year, pressure to consolidate schools has become almost irresistible. But everyone who favors this statewide policy admits consolidation must be "reasonable." The State Board has taken the lead in defining "reasonable." The Resolution adopted on March 9 speaks directly to this proposal. Closing Pickens and Valley Head, and busing young children over dangerous roads for three hours a day to other schools, is not a reasonable decision. If there is <u>any</u> exception to the policy of consolidation, it is here at Pickens and Valley Head.
>
> (Rogers, 1990)

The State Board set a precedent on May 11, 1990 by refusing to accept the Randolph County School's plan to consolidate Pickens and Valley Head Schools (West Virginia Board of Education, 1990).

Dr. David C. Thompson of Kansas State University had revealed that the true motives of RCBOE were to gain money from the SBA to build a consolidated high school by closing rural schools (Thompson et. al., 1989). This incentive, fueled by state pupil-teacher ratio policy, had managed to starve county school budgets until the only recourse would be school closure. The SBA misled RCBOE into believing that by closing rural schools in the name of efficiency, they would receive money for a new Elkins High School. The RCBOE may have been able to consolidate Pickens 7-12 school, as evidenced by the State Board's remarks.

The conclusion of the "Pickens School State Policy Analysis" was as follows:

> The educational program at Pickens School has deficiencies, as does any School. It is not, however, the totally deficient school which the Proposal would have one believe. Phase II requirement of State Policy 2510 are met in most areas. The areas where they are not met are areas in which the other schools involved also fail to meet standards. If the failure of Pickens School to meet a State Policy requirement is to be a legitimate reason for closing the school, the deficiency should be remedied by the closing. If the deficiency is continued, the school closing has served no educational purpose and the education of the students involved is no more efficient, no more thorough and no better. As demonstrated repeatedly throughout this report, the "Proposal to Close Pickens School" cites educational deficiencies, which are not remedied by consolidation. It fails to address those aspects of Pickens educational program, which are strong and will suffer with consolidation. If in fact one addresses these strengths as demonstrated herein, the net result is an educational loss which, when combined with the loss of individual instruction, loss of community, potential psychological damage, and wasted time in transport, dictates that the proposal to close Pickens School be rejected as a proposal which would detract from the education, and substantially harm the individuals and communities involved, while realizing little or no gain (West Virginia Board of Education, 1990).

The Randolph County Board of Education modified their CEFP to consolidate grades 6-8 from Coalton, and grade 6 from Beverly and the Elkins area into the Elkins Junior High building creating Elkins Middle School. The new Elkins High School composed of grades 9-12 would be connected to the Randolph County Vocational Technical Center adjacent to Midland Elementary. In the event funds were made available in the future, the oldest section of Tygarts Valley Jr/Sr High would be replaced. The SBA accepted this new plan and in 1991 awarded money to build a new high school facility connected to the Vocational Center (RCBOE Minutes, 1991).

Sparks again would fly in Randolph County when the Board voted to name the new school Forest Hills High School. The rationale behind not calling the school

Randolph County High was that rural citizens might be led to believe future consolidations were eminent. Animosity toward Elkins by rural citizens remained high after the fight to preserve rural schools. The RCBOE felt the name Elkins High for a building that housed students from Coalton and Beverly was also not acceptable. Enraged citizens of Elkins and alumni of Elkins High School began a fight immediately to change the school's name to Elkins High School. As the result of this bitter battle, three Board members were elected from the Elkins area. Consequently, the history of Forest Hills High School would span only one year. On the day the new members were sworn into office, they voted to change the name to Elkins High School. A group formed named T.E.A.M., (Together Everyone Achieves More), and began soliciting donations that bought new band and sports uniforms and resurfaced the gymnasium floor, replacing the Forest Hill's timber wolf with the Elkins' orange and black tiger (Grimm, D., Telephone interview March 2001).

The well-orchestrated fight to save Pickens School had left residents of the rural areas with a very negative sentiment toward Elkins. Citizens in Elkins at the time of the consolidated high school name struggle also reported that emotions ran high. Board meetings held during this time saw citizens come very close to blows. The Randolph County School restructuring in the early 1990's left many emotional scars, but the dust of the consolidation war has settled. The dawning of the year 2000 was ushered in with construction on a new addition to Tygarts Valley Jr/Sr High School funded by $9 million from the SBA. The future of

education in Randolph County appears very bright in this new decade with major struggles to build a cohesive school district behind them (Stutle, 1990).

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary

The Ramifications of School Consolidation in Randolph Co., WV.

This final chapter will examine the questions raised in chapter one and propose possible solutions. These are complex issues with very few black and white solutions. Examination of current research may lead to some level of understanding of the choices surrounding rural school closings and consolidations.

From the first recorded school consolidation in Massachusetts in 1838 until the 1930's, few would disagree that there was a need to merge small school districts. "Many one and two-room schools had outlived their usefulness. A survey of adequacy of New York Schools found one-room schools to be inadequate according to modern standards. Some even needed to be condemned" (Yaple, 1948). In 1929, studies showed better scores for graded schools than for one-room schools (School & Society, 1929). Graded schools had higher attendance rates, longer school terms and attracted better-qualified teachers. All of these factors should serve to enhance student performance. Improvements in transportation were making it possible during the early 1900's to begin large-scale school district mergers. From 1930 until the present time, consolidation would become a practice that was closely scrutinized. School mergers prior to 1930 had set the stage for great increases in rural school closings over the following decades. Those early consolidations had achieved the goal of cost savings and improved educational achievement.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the challenges of educating the youth in rural areas have not changed. It is equally important to understand that the United States still has a high percentage of school districts that are primarily rural. Hundreds of one-room schools still exist as a testament to this fact. The change from primarily an agrarian society to an industrial society greatly depleted the rural communities of citizens. It has been a widely held belief that new consolidated schools would provide community centers for uniting these small towns (Berkey, 1929).

Paul Theobold 1994 proposed an unusual idea for why consolidation of rural schools was necessary:

> The idea that the government is neutral regarding different individuals is simply ludicrous. Those individuals that are large corporations have a stacked deck...They spend millions each year wining and dining the people we elect to make decisions for us. And some of the largest corporations today are agribusiness industries with headquarters right here in the United States. As far as the profits of agribusiness industries are concerned, the fewer people in the countryside, the greater their profits.

This presents a very interesting basis for the motives driving school funding legislation.

The advent of the communication age has created a global economy. One of the main goals of "A Nation at Risk" in 1983 was to produce students capable of competing in a global economy. The adage "think globally but act locally" does not seem to apply as rural schools are closed. In an era that is seeing more computers in the rural home, it may no longer be as important to have large schools to offer access to technology (Jolley, 1993).

Another interesting theory about school consolidation by Theobold (1994) implies that it is tied to the American liberal and individualized view. Communality had been replaced by liberalism. For example, the classical and feudal periods were marked by a communal orientation as opposed to an individualist orientation. Modern liberalism has led to a heavily individualized world-view that has resulted in a competitive milieu dominating most economic, political, and educational thinking. "Rural schools also have become the vehicle for a powerful cultural message: success in school means leaving the rural community".

It is generally accepted that consolidation had to occur to some extent as population demographics and society in America changed. To what extent it proceeded, has been debatable, and certainly the welfare of the child should be society's ultimate responsibility. The majority of opinions that consolidated schools have had favorable effects can be found in the research from 1925-1950. Lane (1951) in speaking on vocational agriculture stated:

> Centralization in the secondary schools had brought about many changes that have proved to be of great value in the development of our present-day vocational agriculture programs. However it has brought with it certain conditions that are somewhat undesirable to the pupil or the program; namely, lack of time at home for supervised farming....

Improved attendance, wider curriculum, better libraries and lunch programs were cited as positives for consolidation in Gaumnitz (1946), Settle (1944), and Yaple (1948). A study referred to as the most extensive investigation of one-room schools compared to consolidated schools showed higher mean scores in the consolidated schools (School & Society, 1929). One of the few recent articles

that favored mergers refers to Guilford County, North Carolina. Studies show high marks on SAT scores, decreases in dropout rates, and decreased local cost-per-child educated. It is interesting to note that teacher salaries have risen 18.5 percent and spending on supplies, materials, technology and staff development have set records (Weast, 1997). Weast points out that there are many factors that do lead to successful mergers, not the least of which is extra money to spend.

More articles fall on the side of "bigger is not better." Sher and Tompkins (1976) reported that in Vermont, the nation's most rural state, small high schools seemed to be performing as well as their larger counterparts on the one available output measure, percentage of graduates. Also, there is not a single study among 14 recent consolidation studies controlling for IQ and socioeconomic effect which records a consistent, positive correlation between size and achievement. Melnick (1986) referred to a proficiency exam in Connecticut in which ninth graders in small rural and medium sized schools showed a tendency for higher scores, but that larger high schools have higher percentages of graduates going on to higher education.

The question may be raised regarding the optimum size for a high school. With a wide view of performance indicators that might lead to a conclusion on what size school is best, Elseroad (1977) states: "Though there is wide agreement on the principle of economy of scale among those who have studied school district size, there is little consensus on precise enrollment figures for minimum and optimum size."

It appears that when it comes to economies of scale, rural and urban areas should not share the same standards. The problems of education in rural America are different from those in urban settings. For example, it has been a long held belief that large quantities of time spent on a school bus is counterproductive to education. Woodring (1954) reported: "In a region of large ranches or in mountainous areas it may be found that consolidation will cause the children to spend so many hours on the bus that it is better to improve the local school". Is there any reason to believe that disadvantages of too much time spent in transit has any less a negative effect today as it had in the 1950's? School districts have long set guidelines for maximum time spent on a bus, but have allowed bus rides to exceed these established times in order for school mergers to occur. Only urban school districts have had the luxury of separate busing of elementary and secondary students. For some unknown reason, it is considered acceptable for secondary students to have longer bus rides. However, it could be proposed that wasted time in transit to school is wasted time no matter what the pupil's age.

Hallanan (1992) stated that: "A fact that has come out of research is that consolidation is expensive...when schools are closed, children have to be bused at a tremendous cost. In terms of human costs, larger schools are conducive to depersonalization, which leads to student dropout and drug or alcohol problems". This is not to imply that country schools do not have dropouts and drug or alcohol problems, but these are of higher incidence in larger consolidated school settings. It would appear that society is trading one set of problems for a problematic

solution when it chooses to merge schools. The end result often shows only meager savings in the name of efficiency.

The goals of consolidation have been efficiency of delivery, expanded curriculum offerings, and improved student academic performance. Prior to 1930 all of these were admirable goals and were achieved through reorganization of small rural schools into graded schools. It is debatable whether all of these were achieved from 1930-1980 as previously consolidated schools were further merged. Gaumnitz (1946) implored educators to consider that consolidation in rural America was education's greatest need. A large amount of research from 1960 to the present does not support this contention.

Another reputable study found no link between school size and educational achievement (Coleman, 1966). A study by Stephenson (1973) comparing a consolidated and a nonconsolidated school in a southern Appalachian county found "few, if any, major differences between the two schools on the achievements, aspirations and adjustment measures available". Sher (1977) stated: "repeated references are made to research that 'proves' better quality education, economies of scale, heightened efficiency and tax equity will result from reorganization."

But upon careful scrutiny, it turns out that the relevant research proves no such thing. In a report by Fanning (1995):

> Belief in the principle of economies of scale and the pursuit of national educational goals related to economic competitiveness have led school leaders to seek "the one best system" of schooling—usually, the large comprehensive high school with feeder districts. As rural communities with weakened economies have become more dependent on state funds, these attitudes plus state funding and accreditation formulas have led to

> increased school consolidation. In addition, growing evidence indicates that school consolidation offers little or no advantage in controlling costs.

Additionally, Howley (1997) refutes "bigger is better" when he stated "recent research dismisses the notion that large schools offer better learning opportunities for students at less cost than smaller schools".

The research has substantiated that in the early years of the last century, there was a grave need for reorganization of schools. Recent research would lead to conclusions that school consolidation may be reaching its productive end. This is not to say there are no current situations that might benefit from restructuring. D. H. Monk (1990) in "The Organization and Reorganization of Small Rural Schools" probably states it best: "Consolidation had run its course by 1990 and only hard cases remained". He further stated there is no such thing as the optimally-sized school.

School systems in rural areas in the first decade of 2000 have been faced with the same recurring challenges of properly educating youth in the face of a shrinking tax base, dwindling birth rates, and an aging population. School districts in cooperation with states will need to seek alternatives to further consolidation in order to offer a quality education to rural youth.

The need for viewing urban and rural education differently is not a new idea, as evidenced by Satterlee (1950) who wrote: "differences in city and rural areas call for differing systems of delivery. Economics call for large units of students but this is more difficult in rural areas". It would appear that the task for the West Virginia State Legislature to solve the funding problems of rural schools may lie in an alternative method for disbursement of state aid. Thompson (1990) speaks

of this need in the Journal of Education Finance, where he revealed that the majority of states have methods of compensating for ruralness in their funding formulas. West Virginia may need to investigate this if it ever wishes to do justice to a "thorough and efficient" education for the rural child.

For generations, rural folk in Appalachia have supplied the raw materials for industrialization. The time is long overdue for that wealth to be redistributed in the form of aid for high quality education in the country setting. Jess (1984) makes a rather poignant call for Iowa's larger businesses located in urban centers to offer assistance to rural students through partnerships. The most popular areas of cooperation are: allowing their employees to serve on school advisory committees, providing work experiences to high school students, hosting class visits, allowing employees to assist classroom teachers, and providing awards and scholarships.

Local school districts should not look to the legislature nor to corporate America to solve all of their budget woes. Instead, small rural districts must work cooperatively with their neighboring districts in creative ways to share resources. It is a sad reality, however, that cooperation across district lines is extremely rare, as evidenced by Seal and Harmon (1995): "Economics of scale achieved by many counties in most SBA projects far exceeded expectations of the legislature. No two counties, however, chose to join together to cross crounty [sic] (school district) lines and combine schools-more evidence that local control of schools is a prized possession in rural areas". In spite of the associated difficulties, though, creative mergers are occurring in rural areas of America. Abercrombie (1998)

reports one very interesting consolidation: "Voters in three rural towns in Vermont and one in New Hampshire have decided to join forces and create what is believed to be the nation's first K-12 public school district to cross state lines".

Sharing of resources in the form of personnel, technology, staff development, and exceptional programs is an alternative that needs to be utilized in small rural schools. The possibilities for enhancement of programs would be great if interdistrict cooperation could become the norm. Members of the Randolph County Rural Board of Education made in-roads in intercounty cooperation during the battle to save Pickens and Valley Head Schools, but the RCBOE was not in a receiving posture.

Partial reorganization alternatives have been recommended for the rural schools by Jolley and Deloney (1993): "Partial reorganization alternatives involve cooperative efforts between districts or between districts and other organizations, thus increasing the size of the population served or of the resource base without the negative effects of total mergers. Distance education provides a means to expand curriculum and facilitates district cooperation". Additionally, the use of distance learning has been utilized by many rural schools and will continue to be of great benefit as its delivery is upgraded by rapidly improving technologies. A major drawback of distance learning, however, is that it can be very expensive. Frequently it has been the only avenue to deliver a foreign language curriculum in many small rural schools. A stark reality is that teacher shortages in specific fields will force districts to rely heavily on distance learning and personnel sharing. The present and growing shortage of physics instructors in West

Virginia is one example of a dire need for alternative delivery methods (Bennett, D, Interview, 2000).

Frequently, educators are questioning what role the Internet will play in the future of curriculum delivery. Presciently, Howley (1992) has considered this very question: "In the future the need for territorially-based schooling may be eliminated by telecommunications." Indeed, one of the arguments for consolidation, increased library holdings, may well be a moot point with the availability of Internet-connected computers presently in rural schools. With the rapid pace of technology and realistic simulations on the horizon, it is hard to imagine what the course of school curriculum will become in the next two decades.

In spite of the difficulties, there are cases where successful school consolidations are still occurring in Vermont, New Hampshire, and North Carolina (Abercrombie, 1998). The common thread that links the difficu consolidations throughout the years has been community involvement. Rural communities want to be a part of their schools and feel that they have some semblance of control over reorganization. In 1935 a Virginia county school superintendent spoke of efforts to educate the public before district reorganization:

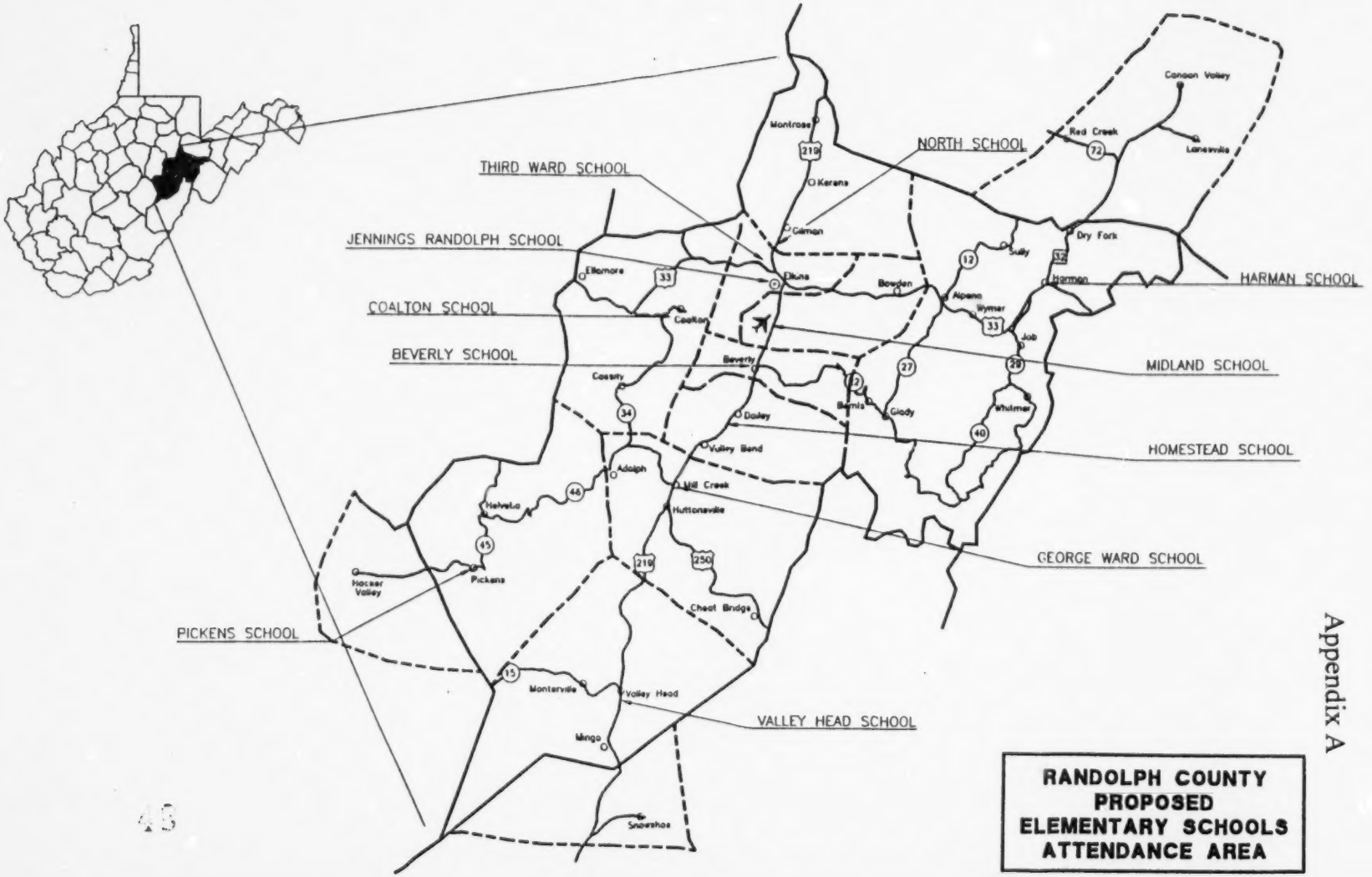
> The members of two school boards realized that a program of education for the citizens of the two counties must precede the actual act of consolidation, and, through the school leagues, parents organizations and the local newspaper, this program was systematically explained and every effort made to get the citizens of the division acquainted with the issues involved and with the advantages to be obtained and as a result a majority of the best people were soon intelligently aligned with the school district officials (Gayle, 1935).

Thirteen years later, Illinois was achieving successful mergers using similar measures. "Consolidation is proceeding rapidly in Illinois by a method involving a great deal of public meeting and input. With community involvement the consolidation is becoming very successful" (Mulford, 1982). Again, a 1988 study of Nebraska schools comparing K-8 and K-12 districts' views of reorganization stated: "Presidents from both K-8 and K-12 districts continue to hold fast to their conviction that local control is an imperative. Both groups feel that the question of reorganization is best resolved with a high level of local involvement" (Sybouts and Bartling, 1988).

The failure of the 1990 reorganization in Randolph County may be related to the lack of community input. The moment RCBOE began to work on reorganization plans, citizens began to fight the change. Instead of meeting and working with the community, the Board chose to go it alone. The State Board disallowed the district's reorganization plan. The community was not happy with the methods the RCBOE employed and developed mistrust for the system's administrators. This type of sentiment dies very slowly in small rural communities. Positive public relations go a long way in keeping school districts unified in the face of difficult choices (Sybouts and Bartling, 1988).

American society has changed and public schools have evolved to meet new demands. The evolution of a world economy will likely continue to force changes on educational systems. All involved parties must exercise sound judgment as society shapes the future of education; it is often said that this future is, in fact, the children. Allowing economies of scale to drive legislation that produces harmful

effects for education should not be tolerated. The West Virginia Legislature has pushed consolidation to a great extent. In the words of David Honeyman (1990): "School districts in the Appalachian Region have tremendous problems with deteriorating buildings and do not have the means locally to replace facilities. West Virginia utilized the SBA to fund needs projects, but this state agency has pushed school systems to move to consolidation in order to compete for funds". The education of youth should not involve only a competition for funds. A bumper sticker that matches the sentiments of many educators reads, "It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber" (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1979). In light of a changing world, the time has come for the United States of America to supply the funds to keep small rural community schools open.



Appendix A

RANDOLPH COUNTY PROPOSED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE AREA

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